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LEADERSHIP EDUCATION COURSES AND PROGRAM IN DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

This national study of post-secondary departments of agricultural education examined leadership and human resource management/development course offerings, course characteristics, future department plans, backgrounds of faculty, and related outreach activities. The majority of the courses were offered for undergraduate credit and were predominately required courses for agricultural education department majors. Nearly half of the departments offering these courses characterized their courses as non-traditional. Departments not offering leadership courses cited a lack of resources, institutional impediments and resistance, and lack of student demand as reasons for not offering the courses. Nearly half of the faculty teaching leadership education courses had traditional agricultural education backgrounds. "Workshops and seminars" was the most frequently cited setting for leadership education outreach. It was concluded that departments of agricultural education are becoming increasingly involved in development and delivery of leadership education courses and outreach, both at the undergraduate and graduate level. Recommendations from the study included a call for collaboration with other departments involved in leadership, specific faculty preparation and academic grounding in the research and behavioral foundations of leadership, and creation of programs with sound scholarship foundations.

Introduction

Leadership theorists (Gardner, 1990; Kouzes & Posner, 1990; Bolt, 1996) believe we are approaching the twenty-first century with a dramatic deficit in leaders. They suggest future leaders need to be able to face complexities, volatility and the new rules of the global marketplace. Other theorists believe the deficit already exists (Watt, 1995; Hesselbein, et.al 1996). Both sentiments were echoed by faculty and employers in a study by Bosshamer (1996). Bosshamer reported employers and faculty projected one of the important skills needed by graduates of colleges of agriculture in the immediate and future (five years) was leadership. This finding was congruent with an earlier study by Litzenberg and Schneider (1988).

Bolt (1996) extends this debate in his contention that this deficit is not a deficit of leadership, but a deficit in leadership development. It is believed traditional methods used to train and educate executives produce managers, not leaders, and have been out-paced by dramatic changes in the world. Additionally, assumptions that leaders will be produced through on-the-job experiences in organizations are false.

Education systems also have been criticized for their inability to develop leaders (Gardner, 1990). The emphasis systems place on individual performance at the expense of group performance, and on society's need for experts and professionals rather than leaders, is said to "snuff out" leadership development among students.

Many post-secondary institutions are addressing this need for leadership development through curricular and co-curricular offerings, and often the leadership development offerings are found in departments of agricultural education. A study of departments of agricultural education revealed that well over half the departments in the U.S. are offering for-credit undergraduate courses specifically directed toward leadership and leadership development (Brown & Fritz, 1994).

How can leadership development be most effectively taught to address the immediate and future need for leaders? Swatez (1995) purports it is the primary task of the leadership educator to establish an environment that “is open to debate, discussion and even disagreement with the texts, the instructor and one another (pg. 76).” Beyond establishing this environment, modeling leadership in the classroom is believed to be critical. The next challenge is content. The content of leadership courses hinges on several important considerations: students’ comfort with the concept of leadership, identification of the elements of leadership, acceptance that leadership is a process, heightened awareness of the practice of leadership, establishment of the purposes of leadership, identification of individual strengths and weaknesses on the way to developing a personal leadership approach, enhancement of analytical skills and sharing of new and emerging leadership theories (Wren, 1994; Lewis, 1995; Watt, 1995).

A variety of teaching strategies emphasizing real world application of concepts are considered critical as well (e.g., outside speakers, case studies, shadowing experiences). These experiential components of the classroom offer the student opportunities to bridge the classroom and community, and to serve and observe in a variety of organizations beyond the academic environment. Exposure to the different forms of leadership through out-of-classroom involvement offers concrete experiences and background knowledge upon which students can draw as they

integrate leadership theories and skills (Kouzes & Posner, 1990; Wren, 1994; Bolt, 1996).

Purpose

This study sought to identify current and emerging national trends in Departments of Agricultural Education that offer leadership and human resource management/ development through addressing the following objectives:

1. Determine if courses are solely for department majors or offered college or institution-wide.
2. Determine the characteristics (e.g., course title, course objectives, primary teaching methodologies used in instruction) of leadership and human resource management/development courses.
3. Determine future plans for offering leadership and human resource management/ development courses and identify characteristics of expanding programs.
4. Ascertain the backgrounds of leadership and human resource management/ development faculty.
5. Determine the extent of leadership and human resource management/ development department outreach activities.

Methodology

Population

The population for this study was all post-secondary departments of agricultural education identified in the *Directory of teacher educators in agriculture* (1992) whose department title contained the words “agricultural education.” The researchers recognized that this selection criteria

would not necessarily capture all academic departments in the business of providing agricultural education; however, they felt that this means of selection would provide for replicability in future or confirmatory studies and would be the best objective means for identifying traditional departments of agricultural education. This qualifier resulted in 58 departments which was further decreased to 53 by eliminating departments outside the United States or no longer in existence since the publication of the directory.

Instrumentation

Data was collected via a survey questionnaire developed from a review of relevant literature and corresponding to the objectives of the study. The questionnaire sought faculty and student opinions regarding leadership and human resource management/development courses, enrollment statistics, and characteristics of the faculty teaching leadership or human resource management/development courses. The instrument was reviewed for content and face validity by one current and two former department heads of agricultural education, and adjustments were made based on their comments.

Data Collection

In the first phase of this research, a questionnaire package containing the questionnaire, cover letter and stamped, return envelope was mailed to the chairs or department heads of the 53 departments. Follow-up procedures were undertaken (i.e. repeat mailings and telephone requests of non-respondents). Because of the nature of the study, early and late response behavior was considered irrelevant. Inside of six weeks, all 53 departments had submitted usable questionnaires (100% response rate). In the second phase of the research, 36 chairs or department heads who reported they offer "courses which deal primarily with leadership and human resource management/development" were asked to submit leadership and human

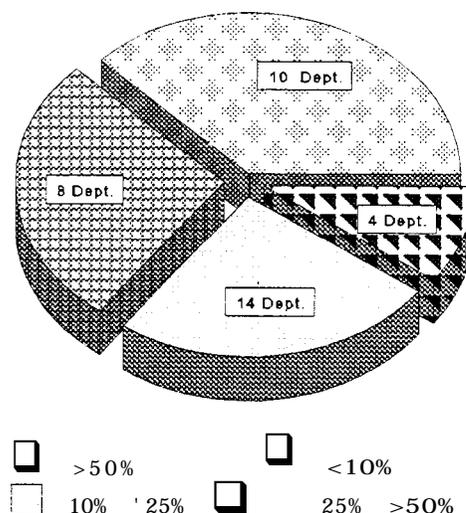
resource management/development course syllabi for analysis, 34 respondents provided a total of 80 syllabi. The survey results were tabulated to find means, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages; the syllabi were analyzed utilizing a content analysis technique suggested by Sayles (1985).

Results

In the first phase of the study, fourteen departments (25.4%) indicated that leadership and human resource management/development courses were required in the undergraduate core for all agriculture and natural resources students at their institution. Thirty-two departments (58%) indicated that leadership and human resource management/development courses were required of all students with a major in agricultural education.

As displayed in Figure 1, among the 36 departments of agricultural education offering courses in leadership and human resource management/development, those courses accounted for more than 50% of the undergraduate student enrollment (or credit hour production) in 10 (28%) of those departments.

Figure 1 Leadership education enrollment as percentage of total enrollment



Characteristics of Courses Offered

An analysis of the 80 course titles revealed that “leadership” was the most frequently used word appearing in 59 (73%) of the considered titles. The next most frequently occurring words were “agriculture” which appeared in 44 (55%) of the titles and “development” which appeared 41 times (51%). Of the 80 courses described by respondents, 56 (70%) are offered for undergraduate credit, 16 (20%) for graduate credit, and eight (10%) for either undergraduate or graduate credit.

Twenty-five course syllabi included a course objective related to leadership styles and/or characteristics. Additionally, 14 courses had objectives related to preparation of youth leadership development professionals.

Eight percent of the reporting institutions indicated that these courses were taught through the use of a combination of lecture, discussion, and case study methods. A wide variance was found in course texts from the use of no text to the use of prepared packets. The most commonly required course texts found throughout the course syllabi were *The leadership challenge* (Kouzes & Posner, 1990) and *Why leaders can't lead* (Bennis, 1989) used in seven and four courses, respectively.

Five percent of the respondents reported that their leadership and human resource management/development courses had an experiential component. The analysis of course syllabi content revealed that 16 courses require students to apply leadership knowledge gained to a real world situation or issue. Forty-seven percent agreed that they would describe their leadership and human resource management/development courses as “non-traditional.”

Plans for the Future

Among the 55 departments of agricultural education responding to the questionnaire in phase one of the study, 9% (n=5) indicated that they plan to “dramatically expand course offerings (in leadership and human resource management/development),” 38% (n=21) “plan some expansion of course offerings,” 51% (n=28) have “no plans for increases or decreases,” and 2% (n=1) “plan to drastically curtail or suspend courses in this area.” Of the 19 departments reporting they did not offer leadership and human resource management/development courses, four (21%) reported that they planned to offer courses of this type in the future. The primary reason cited by departments not offering these types of courses was a “lack of resources,” followed by “institutional impediments and resistance,” and “lack of student demand.” Only two (3.6%) of the 55 reporting departments indicated that they had discontinued a previously offered leadership or human resource management/development course.

Characteristics of Growing Programs

Those respondents indicating plans for “some” or “dramatic expansion” of leadership and human resource development/management course offerings had offered courses in this area from one to 30 years with an average of 13.8 years and had their primary leadership and human resource development/management enrollment at the undergraduate level.

Six respondents indicated that approval for these courses would be “difficult,” nine responded that approval would be “easy” or “extremely easy.” In terms of the agricultural education faculty itself, 97% (n=33) of those departments indicating that they have growing programs indicated that the faculty was either “extremely” or “somewhat supportive,” with 3% (n=1) “ambivalent” toward leadership and human resource development/management courses.

Approximately half of the faculty (n=9) currently teaching courses in this area were characterized as having "traditional agricultural education backgrounds," some (n=7) had agricultural education backgrounds but with special training or skills in the area of leadership or management, and the remaining (n=2) had backgrounds in a discipline other than agricultural education.

Other Leadership and Human Resource Management/Development Activities

Twenty-five departments indicated that they offer leadership and human resource management/development training in settings other-than-for-credit courses. These respondents listed "workshops and seminars (n=25)," "individual consulting projects (n=13)," and "cooperative extension activities (n=10)" as the primary settings for these other-than-for-credit courses.

Conclusions Recommendations and Implications

The results of this study combined with the previous report of Brown and Fritz (1994) affirm the contention that many traditional post-secondary programs of agricultural education are increasingly involved in leadership education and development and are making those programs integral parts of their academic curriculum. It is apparent that within the aggregate considerable departmental energy and resources are being devoted to this effort. If leadership development is to either become or continue to be a growing part of the academic offerings of departments of agricultural education, it is essential that efforts of continuous improvement and enhancement be undertaken. While it is clear that prescient departments and individual faculty have established popular and well subscribed leadership development programs, it is unlikely that these programs can be sustained and or expanded to their full potential without specific and

considerable attention to both the internal quality of the courses themselves and to external credibility and relations with other academic units. Post-secondary departments of agricultural education can rightfully lay a claim to a long, proud, and venerable tradition of leadership development; however, the ability to create, sustain, and increase academic programs in leadership education and development will require certain adjustments and allocations of resources. Specifically:

1. Leadership is by its nature multi-disciplinary. Agricultural education departments must reach out to their academic colleagues in departments of business management, psychology, political science, sociology, educational leadership, and elsewhere to engage in collaboration on academic offerings and research. Those departments which attempt to sustain leadership programs entirely within the confines of an agricultural education venue are likely to have their offerings both limited to agriculture/natural resources students and to attacks on the credibility and appropriateness of those programs.
2. Departments offering leadership development courses must provide faculty with specific preparation and academic grounding in the research and behavioral foundations of leadership. This will require departments to engage in considerable faculty development and may require agricultural education departments to hire faculty with entirely different educational backgrounds than have been typical in the past. Institutions granting doctorates in agricultural education related fields are well advised to continue and strengthen efforts to provide potential post-secondary faculty with the opportunity to not only ground themselves in leadership theory but to specialize in this

area. A new generation of agricultural education faculty more oriented toward leadership and with appropriate academic credentials are essential to the credibility and long term success of programs.

- 3 Departments of agricultural education which seek to disseminate knowledge about leadership must simultaneously be in the business of creating it. If agricultural education based leadership development programs are to have credibility with other academic disciplines, the most certain way to demonstrate it will be through programs of sound scholarship.

The future of leadership education in departments of agricultural education seems bright and a rich new source of energy and contribution. Major efforts at academic collaboration, faculty development, and scholarly activity will have to accompany these new programs.

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